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Book Reviews

Alexander Reid Ross, *Against the Fascist Creep* (Oakland: AK Press, 2017). 400 pp. Paperback $16.95.

Ross's work is a history of fascism in Europe and America, from around 1900 to the present. It shows how fascism "creeps along" by insinuating itself into mainstream culture and institutions through a "syncretic" appropriation of both reactionary and progressive narratives.

Ross argues that two "primal emotions" drive fascist "hybridization": (1) resentment of modernization by those displaced by it, whom Ross (after Maurice Barrès) calls "superfluous man," and (2) cravings for revenge against those considered responsible for it. Superfluous man is flattered by the fascist suggestion that, far from being a loser, s/he is in actuality an *Übermensch*, a superman, upon whose shoulders the fate of Western civilization rests.

The theme of marginalization or "disenfranchisement" runs throughout the book, however, it is easy for readers to get lost in Ross's painstaking reportage on countless fascist "groupuscles" that fracture and then reconstitute themselves under different names. What makes the book even more challenging is that Ross seems to breeze past developments conventionally viewed as pivotal in the history of fascism, while it dotes on relatively minor figures and insignificant, if momentarily newsworthy, happenings. The word "Nazism," for example, is cited only four times (although both Hitler and the Holocaust are more thoroughly discussed). Meanwhile, pages are devoted to the Nouvelle Droite, to Autonomous Nationalism, to Julius Evola, Alexander Dugin, Troy Southgate, and Savitri Devi. Timothy McVeigh, who instigated the bloodiest domestic terrorist attack in American history until 9/11, is mentioned only once.

Then there is the matter of omission. Ross claims to offer a comprehensive account of fascism, but Hannah Arendt's magisterial study of the subject is not even cited. Nor is Michael Barkun's classic, *Religion and the Racist Right*, which shows that (American-style) Christian Identity profoundly differs from British Israelism, two movements that Ross inaccurately conflates. Ross examines the libertarianism of Ron Paul, Milton Friedman, and Murray Rothbard, as well as the American Tea Party and the handful of "hipster fascists" who reside in Silicon Valley. Yet he fails to acknowledge the existence of *their* mentor and chief inspiration, Ayn Rand. Ross skips over Rand, but does address her major influences, Friedrich Nietzsche and Max Stirner. Rand's self-honored "magnum opus," *Atlas Shrugged* (1957), was slammed by critics at the time as the second worst book in the last 1000 years, yet reportedly it has enjoyed American sales (and hypothetical impact on the American far-right) second only to the Bible.

Speaking of which, Ross fails to entertain the effect that Christianity, particularly Mormonism, may have had on American right-wing terrorists such as J.T. Ready, (ex LDS bishop) Gordon Kahl, Robert Mathews (founder of The Order), and on the Bundy family.

Part of the problem here is that the word "fascism" is at best only loosely defined. Is it, asks Ross, a personality type (Adorno)? an attitude (Reich)? an "escape from freedom" (Fromm)? a "quest for community" (Nisbet)? Or an alliance between the petit bourgeois and the rich (Trotsky)? In the end Ross opts for Roger Griffin's characterization, that it is "palingenetic ultranationalism," a "mythopoetic" resuscitation of ancient origin stories, plus birth announcements of a new man. This does little to clarify things.

I sympathize: fascism is exceedingly hard to pin down. As Ross notes, it displays a family resemblance to traditional conservativism, with its preference for organic solidarity, its celebration of natural hierarchies over individual achievement, its penchant for nostalgia, and above all its suspicion of universal rights. The value of Ross's book is that it demonstrates how, to market itself to contemporary audiences, the far-right has found it necessary to hide its conservative roots and draw more and more on left-wing imagery and memes. To win over young people, for example, it has adopted punk music, heavy metal, and hip hop; and for older folks, UFO conspiracy-mongering and alternative medicine. It supports "(white) worker's rights" and decries "discrimination" (against white people). It speaks to the need for "consciousness-raising" ("White pride worldwide!"), "race justice" ("Equal rights for Whites!"), and "gender equality" (for men). And it advocates "multiculturalism" and "biodiversity" (meaning, the banning of non-Caucasian immigrants from America and the promotion of racial segregation). Today's far right has replaced the old fascist libel, "international Jewish conspiracy," with the more palatable, leftist, label "Zionist." The new far-right lauds "free speech" (against the "tyranny of political correctness") and the "freedom of religion" (to harass gays and abortion providers, and to mandate prayer in public schools). Like liberalism, it too grieves about "genocide" (in this case, of white Christian males). And it has given the liberal concept of individualism a fancy new title: "sovereign citizenship."

Black and brown interests are advanced by an NAACP and recognized on college campuses with black and Latina(o) studies programs. In perverse mimicry, the far-right demands its own *White*-ethnic studies programs, and mounts resistance through an NAA*W*P (National Association for the Advancement of White People). It has softened the unsavory Nazi appeal to *Blut und Boden* (Blood and Soil) by organizing liberalistic-sounding "anti-consumerist, buy local" campaigns, with "pro-life" advocacy, veganism, and no-smoking recommendations. Liberals fantasize about a communitarian "Ecotopia"; the far-right dreams of erecting its own exclusive Christian Citadel.

And now, a final insult: the comfortable leftist canard "fascist!" is being

thrown back at them by the accused. The far-right media are awash in reports of "lesbo-fascists," "eco-fascists," "Islamo-fascists," "body fascists," "technofascists," "homo-fascists," and even "*liberal* fascists." In short, if there is indeed a fascist creep, as Ross supposes, one wonders where it is really coming from: the right or the left?

In 1944 George Orwell wrote that "the word 'fascism' ... is almost entirely meaningless, except in so far as it signifies 'something not desirable'." If nothing else, *Against the Fascist Creep* offers proof.

James Aho
Idaho State University

Anne James, *Poets, Players, and Preachers: Remembering the Gunpowder Plot in Seventeenth-Century England* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2016). 412 pp. Hardback $85.00.

In both the historical and popular imagination, the 1605 Gunpowder Plot is often treated as a singular event, a turning point that led to the Oath of Allegiance and the domestic and international conflicts that accompanied it. Anne James's *Poets, Players, and Preachers: Remembering the Gunpowder Plot in Seventeenth-Century England*, by contrast, takes the plot and situates it within a context of religious conflict and growing nationalism that began in the late sixteenth century and extended well into the seventeenth. To chart this longer history James focuses on how literary responses to the plot—occurring as they did in public ritual, stage plays, epic poetry, and occasional sermons—developed and reformed with the passage of time. The result is a fine example of the iterative relationship between literary and historical inquiry, as well as a complex account of how the memory of a single (and ultimately failed) historical event can come to serve widely divergent ends.

Central to James's analysis is an interest in genre, in particular how successive textual renditions of the Gunpowder Plot not only evidence the motives of their authors but how the process of historical reinterpretation generates changes in literary form. As an analytical frame, genre has several benefits for James's study, perhaps the most important of which is that it attends both to the structure of an individual text and to the expectations and reception that text met in its audience. Genre also offers the opportunity to chart literary developments across a longer historical period, as each moment of interpretation thus simultaneously relies on events and texts that have already gone before it and provides the foundation for subsequent readings. Such processes, James details, could be exploited for particular political ends. Official liturgies and sermons produced in the immediate aftermath of the plot, for example, helped advance King James I's 1606–07 attempts for union between Scotland and England. They did so by comingling his deliverance in Scotland from the 1600 Gowrie Conspiracy with